Excerpt From Talk Given

At Freshettes' Luncheon, SGWU

September 25, 1961--by Wynne Francis

I was given freedom to choose any topic for my talk today--and that's hard! It's so much easier when you know what you are supposed to do; when you are told what to say or think or talk about. Much easier, but dull and not very satisfying. Having to think for yourself, to make decisions and to act on them, is far more exciting and challenging and personally rewarding, as I hope you will discover during your progress through university.

I thought, at one point, that I would talk about "The Heroine as a Model" but I soon abandoned that idea. Everyone I mentioned it to thought I was going to speak about Drug Addiction and Fashion Models--so outmoded is the concept of the heroic or the idea of a model as a person of good character! Anyway, that would have been at best a theoretical discussion and might even have become a sermon. I decided to stay away from "oughts" and "don'ts" and "shoulds" and to talk rather about some things that are actually happening in the world of women.

What are women actually doing these days that their mothers and their grandmothers didn't do? Recent surveys in most of the countries of the Western World indicate that more women are getting married these days; they are getting married earlier (the average age is 20); they are having larger families (from 3 to 6 children), with the children more closely spaced; their last child is in school by the time the mothers are in mid-thirties, and, at that age, women are entering or re-entering the labour market and holding paid jobs outside the home for the next 20 to

25 years of their lives.

All this is in sharp contrast to what women were actually doing 50 years ago. In other words, a quiet but profound and far-reaching social revolution has taken place in our century. I say quiet, though it began noisily enough with the Woman's Suffrage Movement, but, looking back, it would seem that the Suffragettes were themselves more of a symptom than a cause. Surely many factors--the Industrial Revolution, advances in technology, urbanization, the development of psychology, the advances in general health and welfare--these and many other forces have contributed to this marked modification of women's role in society. Notice that I have said modification of woman's role in society--not change--things haven't gone that far! But I might better have said complication of woman's role, or better still, multiplication of woman's roles, for this implies both the exhilaration of freedom and the responsibilities of choice that I have already mentioned as being at once painful and rewarding.

Never before in history, have women had so much freedom. Needless to say, it is not an unmixed blessing. In fact, it is sometimes regarded as modern women's dilemma; and certainly it is attended by many serious problems affecting society as a whole. Some specialists suggest that these problems cannot be solved without a radical reorganization of the total society. Morose predictions are made in some quarters about the degeneration of the family, the rise in juvenile delinquency, etc., as being the cost of woman's new freedom.

However this may be, the facts are that at present, women make up 1/3 of the total labour force of the United States (Canada is

apparently following the same pattern with a lag of 12 to 15 years) 1/3 of the working women are married and 1/3 of all the married women are working. It is predicted that by 1970 (less than 9 years from now) close to 1/2 of the labour force will be women; and that the average woman worker will be married and will be 41 years of age.

Leaving it to the moralists, the psychologists, the sociologists and the economists to work out the rights and wrongs and the social implications of this phenomenon of our world, let us, you and I, consider, for a moment, what it can mean to you.

Now I know that none of you is a "statistic". Not one of you, perhaps, will be the "typical", and certainly not the "average" woman I have been talking about. You are individual persons, Joan and Debbie and Barbara and Pat. And you are further distinguished by the fact that you are now pursuing a university course which relatively few women do. Yet the chances are good that as a group you will come statistically close to the norm as predicted.

Right now, you probably cannot imagine what it is like to be 41 years of age. Perhaps at the moment you are thinking no farther ahead than the Freshman Ball. But I am suggesting that you do some long-range thinking about the matters I have brought to your attention. Imagine yourself living to be seventy or older. The life-span of women today is long. They outlive the men, and they tend to live to be 75 or older. Most of you, then, have upwards of 50 years of living to plan for. The first twenty of these 50 years may go fast--four to finish college, perhaps a few years at a job or further studies, then, most likely,

marriage and 10 or 15 years raising a family. The next twenty--the middle years--are perhaps harder to imagine and these are the ones most important to plan for. These can be, have been for many women, empty, lonely difficult years. Margaret Mead has given us a vivid description of these years

> Some day, while she is still a young woman, she will have to face a breakfast table with only one face across it, her husband's, and she will be alone, quite alone, in a home of their own. She is out of a job; her main justification, the work for which she "gave up everything", is gone, and yet there are still two, possibly, three, meals a day to get, the door to be answered, the house to be cleaned. But there are only dishes for two and floors do not need to be polished so often when there are no children's feet to track them up. She isn't completely out of a job, but she is on the shelf, kicked upstairs, given one of the placebos by which large organizations, whose employees have tenure, try to disguise from the employee who is still too young to be retired the fact that he ought to be.

and another specialist has commented

> Under such circumstances not a few women are seized by a feeling of emptiness and lack of purpose, to which they react in different ways according to temperament and disposition. Whether they become nagging and discontented, whether they have a nervous breakdown, or whether they find an outlet in playing bridge or golf, in 'visiting' and shopping, or in devoting their energies to local charities or, in rare cases, to politics or artistic creation--the basic motive underlying these and other variations is that, the middle of their lives, in full possession of their powers, they have come to the end of their chosen career.

Now the modern woman who has appeared in the guise of statistics throughout my talk, is doing something about these years. She is taking up a career, or at least a paying job, outside of the home. In your case, perhaps you will follow her pattern. If that is so, I am suggesting that a good investment <u>now</u>, of time and energy, of thoughtful planning, of serious attention to studies through-

out the next four years, will pay off handsomely in the kind of job, and the type of work you want to do when that time comes.

But perhaps you will not follow that pattern. Perhaps you will not marry. You will then take some kind of paying job. In that case, I do not need to underline the importance to you of your college education. Or perhaps you will marry but will not enter the labour force at the predicted time. What good is a college education to a married woman? In case you have any doubts, let me give you the unanimous reply to that question when it was seriously asked of a group of married women who are college graduates

> The majority of contributors, stressed the value of university education in broadening the mind, increasing sensibilities and improving the standards of judgment and understanding--all of which, they said, were assets also in their relations with husband and children, so that their education had on no account been wasted even if it had not been used professionally.

One further observation: housewife or not, the modern woman "goes" for education at the college level. The increase in the number of housewives continuing studies informally, or in formal evening programs is a part of the phenomenon I have been speaking about. Without reverting again to statistics, we have evidence of this in our own city. The McGill Extension Courses, the Thomas More Institute and SGW's evening university programs are attracting more housewives every year. And housewives make good students--especially those who are planning their study programs so as to graduate with their teen-age daughters and sons!

Well, it looks as if you as a woman are in for a busy future,

doesn't it? There is one sad corollary of this trend in the life of modern women that I feel I must point out and that is the gradual but seemingly certain disappearance of grandmothers!--at least of grandmothers as they used to be. For you see, grandmother used to be a dear old lady who was an unfailing source of cookies and knitted mittens and a very devoted baby-sitter. Today she is quite likely to be--even if she doesn't look exactly like Marlene Deitrich--a smart young woman in her early forties, driving a late-model car to her office in the daytime and studying like mad at night to pass her mid-term exams!

So much for progress! In this century, we have abolished child-labour, put married women to work and transformed grandmothers!

More seriously, I have tried today merely to raise some issues for your consideration. I have not attempted to answer any problems, nor did I intend to direct you along any specific path. The subject I have merely touched on is really a very deep one, worthy of your further investigation. I will be happy if the glimpse I have given you of it will encourage you to see your college education not as a frill, or an ornament, or a pleasant interlude, but rather as an integrated part of a realistic plan for living a long and happy life as a woman in this complicated society of ours.